

Greetings,

Things were relatively quiet for TJJD at the Legislature last week. With regard to agency funding, the House and Senate have made some decisions on the level of our appropriations, but how the dollars are allocated will be affected by big-picture policy discussions that are still underway. We have worked on proposals for changes to TJJD's budget structure which would serve the agency and county operations far better and would also better facilitate the administration of state programs and facilities. We are waiting to see whether or not this new structure gains traction. TJJD is not scheduled to appear before either our policy-related committees or any budget related committees this coming week, although there will be a number of bills presented that would affect us in one way or the other and we will be present and available for those hearings.

In my last update I told you about Senate Bill 1630, which includes most of the ideas currently being considered for the direction of juvenile justice in Texas. We expect there to be some changes to the language in the bill, but its intent to create a new initiative for counties to provide more services to reduce commitments remains its major focus. There are a number of county-managed facilities that currently contract with other counties for placement purposes. SB 1630 seeks to significantly expand that practice with additional state support. We are currently determining to what extent that may be feasible. Again, the purpose is to further reduce commitments for kids who could be managed in closer proximity to their home communities as long as their treatment needs can be met, which is an extension of some of the reforms that have occurred in the system over the last several years. SB 1630, if passed and funded, would enable the counties to expand their programming which would benefit not only this sub-set of kids who would most likely be committed, but also for their own population of kids who are neither eligible nor in need of state commitment.

Assuming no other major changes to our system, this effort would result in continuing the reduction of kids in our high restriction facilities. We are now considering and have had very preliminary discussions internally about designing a process for developing options for re-purposing the facilities. This is a great opportunity for us to be creative and engage in serious brainstorming sessions of how they could be used to further our mission. There will always be a need for state facilities, not only for our O&A operation but also for special populations and kids who cannot be managed anywhere else, but the next several years will present opportunities to further target what we do and to reimagine how we do it. Raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction to include 17 year old offenders has a tremendous amount of support from many quarters and, if and when passed, would also have a substantial impact on our projected population levels. This, too, will factor into how we chart the course ahead for state programs.

Please continue to let us know if you have any questions and thank you for your work on behalf of our mission. The quality of what we produce every day and our commitment to this work will always be our greatest strength and will serve us and those we are charged to serve very well. So thank you for what you do.

David